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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, October 14, 2005

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Youths urged to join candlelight vigil

Domestic violence group fights physical, emotional abuse

Friday, October 14, 2005

BY CASEY HANS

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

LACASA will host its annual Domestic Violence Candlelight Vigil at 7 p.m. Tuesday on the grounds of the Historic Courthouse in downtown Howell.

The event, in its ninth year, is designed to educate the community about the horrors of domestic violence - both physical and emotional - and will include a number of community speakers, including a family member of a domestic violence victim who will share the family's story.

"It's also a time for remembrance" of those killed because of domestic violence, said Candy Jones-Guerin, marketing and community relations director for LACASA.

The Howell High School choir has been invited to perform for the program and may take part in reading of a list of domestic violence victims from the past year. Jones-Guerin said.

Nicole Matthews-Creech, community education director for the agency, said this year the agency is especially encouraging teens and young adults to attend. She visits high school and middle school health classes throughout Livingston County each week to get the word out about domestic abuse issues.

"We're talking about it a lot in the schools," she said. "We want to stress that it's not just about physical abuse. It's the emotional side too. We hear about people not seeking a safe haven because they think 'it's just emotional abuse.'"

"It begins early in relationships. We want (students) to be aware of warning signs."

She said although statistics show many more females as victims of abuse, the agency is starting to see more young men and boys reporting problems as well. "It happens both ways," she said.

"More and more adolescent girls are starting to use violence in their relationships."

The event, which drew about 50 people last year, has brought out upward of 250 depending on the weather, Jones-Guerin said. "We're out there rain or shine," she said.

LACASA also will have counselors on hand to talk with people after the event, which Matthews-Creech said can be rather emotional for many people.

There were 48 people killed in the past year in Michigan because of domestic violence, according to LACASA. But that is just the number of deaths reportedly linked to it, she said.

"There are many others (deaths) that are not reported as a domestic violence complaints."

In Livingston County, some 67 percent of assaults prosecuted are domestic related incidents, Matthews-Creech said.

LACASA, the nonprofit agency previously known as the Livingston Area Council Against Spousal Abuse, hosts its candlelight event each year as part of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, which is commemorated in October.

Established in 1981, the Howell-based agency provides domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse services and programs to victims, their families and friends, and also offers services to perpetrators of domestic violence.

Domestic violence vigil

Ann Arbor News

Friday, October 14, 2005

What: Ninth annual event to bring awareness to the issue of domestic violence.

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Where: Amphitheater and lawn at the Historic Courthouse in downtown Howell.

Who: Coordinated through LACASA, a nonprofit Livingston County agency providing counseling services for domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

Details: LACASA staff will provide candles. Call (517) 548-1350.

Hotlines: The agency offers 24-hour crisis lines. For domestic violence call (810) 227-7100; for sexual assault call (517) 548-4228.

October proclaimed as Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October 13, 2005

By: Bill Brown, Editor
Allegan County News

The Allegan City Council honored one of their own on Monday, Oct. 10, when, during their regular meeting, each council member shared their thoughts with Sherrie Hoffman as she sat through her final meeting. Hoffman is not seeking re-election during the November election, Hoffman will be completing about five years of service to the city.

She was first appointed to council as a replacement for former councilman Keith Behm. A retired Allegan High School administrator, Hoffman recently completed an interim assignment at the school.

"On behalf of the City of Allegan, I want to thank you for stepping forward and serving this city when we needed you," Mayor Jon Cook told Hoffman. "Your insight into the issues we have had to deal with made a valuable contribution to solving those problems. We wish you nothing but the best of luck as you go on with your life."

In other business:

Cook issued a proclamation designating October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Allegan and presented the document to Sherry Lorback-Dietz, executive director of Sylvia's Place and Jason Kae Smith of the Center for Women in Transition.

©Allegan County News 2005

Teen rape similar to Wyoming case

Friday, October 14, 2005

By Nate Reens

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A man who allegedly raped a 14-year-old girl as she walked to Madison Middle School on Thursday took advantage of her decision to duck into an alley while trying to elude him, police say.

Grand Rapids Sgt. Tim Williams said the suspect trailed the eighth-grader as she walked alone near Giddings Avenue and Hall Street SE about 7:45 a.m.

"I think he saw this young girl by herself and believed it was his perfect opportunity," Williams said. "She was able to notice him following her but couldn't get away before he grabbed her and took her to the ground."

The girl entered the alley, believing she would be able to escape. After the sex assault, she walked to the school, formerly Iroquois Middle School, and told teachers and administrators, who called police.

Williams said he would compare notes and descriptions of the suspect, whom the victim said was a heavy-set man younger than 30, and about 5-foot-9, with Wyoming police.

Last year, Wyoming investigated a similar rape of a 14-year-old Discovery Alternative High School student.

In that incident, the student told authorities she cut through a parking lot near 54th Street and Division Avenue when a masked man pulled her from behind and raped her near a parked car. The girl in Thursday's offense said her attacker wore a mask over his face, and a black hooded sweatshirt.

"They (the crimes) do sound the same, but they are on opposite sides of town," Williams said. "We will look into it to see if they could be related."

Larry Johnson, the school district's public safety director, said patrols by security officials and administrators would increase today and in the future to try to ward off another assault. He encouraged parents to do the same.

"These are difficult situations and something that gets a lot of parents unnerved," Johnson said.

"It's unfortunate for us and for the community," he said. "We need to take it as a time to become more vigilant."

Authorities say students should walk in groups to and from school, identify safe places along their route and be aware of suspicious-looking cars and people.

Johnson said if children feel threatened, they should yell to attract attention, possibly scaring off a potential attacker.

"Anything that can get people to notice is a good move," he said. "Go into a store, find a city bus, anything to avoid danger."

Supreme Court upholds conviction of sex offender

Friday, October 14, 2005

By Tim Younkman
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

An "insignificant" point used to overturn the conviction of a school volunteer accused of molesting first grade girls has been thrown out by the Michigan Supreme Court and the conviction is upheld, said Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran.

The volunteer, Randall Couturier, 59, was convicted by a Bay County Circuit Court jury in August 2003 of touching two girls as they took reading tests.

Couturier was a school volunteer helping in the first-grade class taught by his wife at Hampton Elementary School.

The conviction originally was appealed on the basis that one of the victims allegedly had written a note to Couturier, and Circuit Judge Kenneth W. Schmidt ruled that the girl could not be questioned about the note.

"It was a very minor and insignificant point of trial," Sheeran said of the defense objection to the ruling.

"We felt that if the Court of Appeals had applied a certain standard to the judge's ruling, it would not have been overturned, but the Court of Appeals used another standard, an inappropriate one we think, to conclude that there was an error by the judge. We appealed that decision to the Supreme Court.

"We didn't feel that this should be the basis of overturning the conviction, that it wasn't a serious error, if it was an error, to warrant that," Sheeran said.

He said the jury believed the testimony of the victims and believed that such acts were committed against them.

"I am pleased that this was reversed by the Supreme Court," Sheeran said.

He said the case has been sent back to the Court of Appeals to be reviewed, but Sheeran said he is confident that Couturier's conviction will stand.

Couturier is serving a prison sentence of 71 months to 15 years. He has remained in prison during the appeal process, Sheeran said.

Teen inmate reports assault

By Michael Jones, Herald Times Staff Writer

October 14, 2005

GAYLORD - Charges may be pending for three area men lodged in the Otsego County Jail for allegedly assaulting a 14-year-old Lewiston boy inside their jail cell.

The alleged incident, which Sheriff Jim McBride said happened last week, is currently under investigation by his department. McBride said the boy has since been moved to another cell. The youth, who will be tried as an adult in Otsego County on an unrelated matter, reportedly told a corrections officer and his mother during a visit Thursday, that the men, ages 17, 19 and 23, had stolen his food, physically roughed him up and one of them had committed a sexual act in front of him while in the cell.

The young man was jailed last week after he reportedly broke conditions of his bond on charges of breaking and entering with intent and home invasion - first degree. The young man was also apprehended in September in connection with the breaking and entering of several Lewiston businesses. He faces charges in Montmorency County.

McBride said because the minor has several past involvements with the legal system, District Court Judge Patricia A. Morse waived the young man from juvenile to adult court last week where he will be tried as an adult.

According to Otsego County prosecutor Kyle Legel it was not a violation to lodge the Lewiston boy in the same cell with adults, although if space was available, consideration should have been given to keep the youth segregated from the older jail population.

Due to an ongoing overcrowding situation at the jail, which on Monday had 52 prisoners, McBride said they had no choice but to lodge the 14-year-old with older adult prisoners.

Although the jail has a maximum capacity of 34 prisoners, Corrections supervisor Brian Webber said the jail has been averaging more than 40 prisoners a day this year. The facility averaged 39.5 prisoners a day in 2004.

After the assault allegations came to light Thursday, Legel said he personally visited the county jail and spoke to Sgt. Mike Anthony who was conducting the investigation into the incident. Legel said he expected to receive a copy of the report later this week or by the beginning of next week. He will then make a decision whether there is enough evidence to file charges against the three men.

Teen apprehended after chase in stolen pickup

Friday, October 14, 2005

LaNIA COLEMAN
THE SAGINAW NEWS

MIDLAND -- A 16-year-old runaway landed in the Midland County Juvenile Care Center after she led police on a chase and rammed a patrol car with a stolen pickup Wednesday afternoon. Prosecutors were to review police reports and consider charges against the teen, whose wild ride started about 2:45 p.m. in a downtown Midland parking garage.

"Five Midland County residents, who know the owner of the pickup, drove around Midland looking for the truck," said Midland Police Capt. John Oswald. "When they found it in the parking garage, they attempted to box it in and approach the driver."

The group, all of whom are adults, also know the teen, Oswald said.

When confronted by the adults, the teen put the 1992 Ford F-150 into gear and rammed their car twice, causing a minor leg injury to one of the adults, the captain said.

On the third try, the teen was able to drive around the car and leave the garage, but not without the group close on her trail, Oswald said. While the adults followed the teen, one of them called 911.

A Midland police officer and a sheriff's deputy picked up the pursuit on Patrick near Washington, Oswald said. The chase continued about two miles as Patrick turns into Indian then Eastman.

"The officers disengaged the pursuit because of traffic conditions and the speed and (erratic) manner in which the girl was driving," he said. "An unmarked (police) vehicle in the area attempted to follow her to see where she was going, in hopes of catching her if she stopped and got out of the truck."

The officer shadowed the teen as she wound her way through the city to East Ashman.

Anticipating the teen's likely path, another officer waited on Novak just south of East Ashman, the captain said.

"The vehicle turned (onto Novak) and headed straight at the patrol vehicle that was parked at an angle across the road with its lights on," Oswald said.

The pickup swerved around the cruiser, striking the left front fender, and continued south on Novak to the dead-end, he said. With nowhere else to go, the young woman turned the truck around and headed back toward the officer.

"She went around the patrol car toward East Ashman, where she attempted to make a right turn going too fast," Oswald said.

Momentum pitched the pickup into a tree, disabling it.

Police took the teen into custody after a brief foot chase.

Bus bullying 'not a racist thing'

Friday, October 14, 2005

By John Agar and Dave Murray
The Grand Rapids Press

GREENVILLE -- A 16-year-old accused of bullying an 11-year-old on a Greenville school bus last month denied using racial slurs and beating the younger student, his grandmother said. Kyle Anderson, a Greenville High School student, was charged as a juvenile by the Montcalm County Prosecutor with ethnic intimidation and three misdemeanors for assault. He was accused of battering Hunter Ambrose on the school bus over two weeks in September.

Adults charged with the same crime would face up to two years in prison.

"It's not a racist thing," Mary Densmore, the suspect's grandmother and guardian, said Thursday.

"We don't believe in (racism). ... I think it's just kids being kids."

She said she could not believe her grandson could have beaten the seventh-grader that often and severely without the bus driver noticing, or others telling authorities.

Kathy and Paul Ambrose said their adopted son, who suffered bruises up and down his body, was targeted because he is biracial, and he kept quiet to avoid further beatings. His friends were afraid to say anything, they said.

The couple believe Greenville Public Schools officials were unprepared to deal with the incident.

At Monday's school board meeting, they spoke about the alleged assaults.

"They were surprised, and uninformed, as we assumed," Paul Ambrose said of board members.

"Nobody should have to go through this. Our son shouldn't have to go through this. There needs to be a plan in place for if, and when, it happens again."

His son, whom he described as a good student, had many bruises but told his parents he got hurt at football practice, Ambrose said.

On Sept. 23, the boy had tears in his eyes, and a bruise on his forehead. He told his parents Anderson slammed his head into the back of a bus seat.

Kathy Ambrose said she went to the school that day and talked with the transportation director. Other officials had left for the day. That weekend, the family called the Greenville police, who conducted the investigation.

The following Monday, she said she spoke with the middle school's principal and assistant principal, then met with Superintendent Terance Lunger on Oct. 7. The couple followed up by sharing their story with the school board.

Lunger said he thought the parents were pleased with how the district handled the incident. He said the older student was removed from the bus but would not say whether he was suspended from school.

Lunger said high school administrators were investigating the situation.

"There's a process that we need to follow, and the last thing we want is to make a knee-jerk reaction," he said. "We're trying to get all the pieces together."

In the past, the Ambroses said they talked to their son about racism and occasional slurs, and "explained to him that that just shows their ignorance," Paul Ambrose said.

The couple have driven their son to school and back since the incident. They said they have received support from others in the area.

"A lot of support, a lot of shock that this could happen in this community," Paul Ambrose said.

"We can't afford to stick our heads in the sand on this."

District Judge takes court to school for teen lesson on dangers of drinking, drugging, driving

Friday, October 14, 2005

By Scott E. Pacheco
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Timothy J. Kelly hopes all high school students always will be mindful of the dangers of drugs, and of drinking and driving.

But the Bay County district judge realizes sometimes the best he can do is educate area youths. "We are trying to sow the seeds," Kelly said. "We'd like it to be in the front of their mind. Many don't think of the consequences."

On Thursday, Kelly brought his courtroom to juniors and seniors at Bay City Central High School.

Kelly sentenced four men, three of whom had been charged with drinking and driving, and one who was charged with possession of marijuana.

The men all had pleaded guilty beforehand and received credit, either toward community service or jail time, for agreeing to be sentenced at the school.

Most of the defendants received community service, but one multiple offender for operating while intoxicated chose 45 days in jail over an intensive rehabilitation program.

Before sentencing, Kelly played a 15-minute video of a woman talking about a one-car crash she got into after drinking. She suffered facial deformities and now has two glass eyes, the video showed graphic photos of her right after the accident.

Kelly said he had seen the program in other districts, and after getting approval, coordinated the event with officials at Central High School.

"I've spoken to other judges in other parts of the state," Kelly said. "They've had very positive feedback from educators, students and parents, and found it to be a very successful program."

Savas Lujan, a senior at Central, said he thinks the program will inspire some - but not all - students to think twice.

"It's going to affect some people, but other people are going to do it until they get caught," he said.

Another senior, Brittany Castaneda, 17, said the video and sentencing got her attention.

"It was interesting," she said. "You got one person's perspective, you get the real feel of it. It opens your view up to knowing it could really happen."

Don Clark, assistant principal at Central, said he and Kelly are friends, and that bringing court to school would fit in with what the building administrators want to accomplish in educating students.

"The worst possible part of my job is dealing with a student's death," he said. "By having speakers come in, if one kid just thinks twice, than we have saved a life."

Scott E. Pacheco covers education and business for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9646 or by e-mail at spacheco@bc-times.com.

The Detroit News

October 14, 2005

Canton Township

Housing agent's records seized

FBI agents with federal search warrant raided the Canton Township home of a housing agent suspected defrauding Michigan of about \$1 million in low-income housing. Agents seized records from the home of the employee, who was responsible for assisting low-income residents seeking housing. The alleged fraud began in 1994, the government said. The employee currently administers vouchers for more than 400 clients. Her lawyer, Timothy McDaniel, said his client denies any wrongdoing and noted she hasn't been charged with a crime, even though the raid was last month. The FBI also raided the woman's downtown Ypsilanti office and seized \$1,800 from a bank account.

Semiconductor volunteers dedicate Habitat house

Friday, October 14, 2005

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Volunteers from Hemlock Semiconductor Corp. were to dedicate a Habitat for Humanity home at 1 p.m. today that they helped build at 1801 S. Niagara in Saginaw.

More than 80 employees took part in erecting the four-bedroom structure for a working low-income family's discount purchase, said Paul Warriner, Habitat director.

"The house is well-constructed and is finished ahead of schedule," Warriner said. "We are hopeful this will lead to a long-term partnership with Hemlock Semiconductor and its employees."

Daily lunches for volunteers came from Currie Cafe in Midland's Arnold Center, a vocational training facility for people with barriers to community inclusion.

Since 1987, Saginaw Habitat has produced 128 homes, most newly constructed, for first-time buyers. Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit ecumenical Christian housing ministry that has served more than 200,000 families worldwide.

For more information on Saginaw Habitat, call 753-5200. Volunteers need not possess home-building skills.

Center's worker, director charged in abuse

By Andrea Blum, The News-Herald

PUBLISHED: October 12, 2005

RIVERVIEW — An employee at Rivergate Health Care Center, 14041 Pennsylvania Road, was arraigned on abuse charges Friday at 27th District Court in Wyandotte.

The center's director was charged with failing to report the incident.

Victoria Konesky, 61, of Riverview was charged with one count of fourth-degree vulnerable adult abuse. The charge carries a maximum penalty of a year in prison and/or a \$100 fine.

Elizabeth Edenstrom, 38, of Belleville faces one count of failure to report mistreatment of a patient, punishable by 90 days in jail and/or a \$100 fine.

Investigators from the state Attorney General's Office's Health Care Fraud Division arrested the women earlier that day.

The incident dates to Dec. 18, 2004, when Konesky allegedly caused first- and second-degree burns to the face and hands of a 62-year-old man living at the center.

According to the complaint, the man was injured after Konesky failed to disconnect his oxygen tubes before lighting his cigarette.

Attorney General Mike Cox also alleges that Edenstrom neglected to report the accident to the Michigan Department of Community Health.

"It's essential that our loved ones living in nursing homes can depend on their caregivers for a safe environment," state Attorney General Mike Cox said.

Konesky was released on a \$1,000 personal recognizance bond. Edenstrom was released on a \$250 cash bond. The two will be back in court Oct. 27 for a pretrial hearing.

Katrina followed by flood of fraud cases

Officials eyeing
phony refugees,
identity thieves

10/14
LS By LARA JAKES JORDAN
3P Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hurricane Katrina has spawned a second big flood that is surging well beyond the Gulf Coast: thousands of cases and complaints alleging fraud.

Seven weeks after the storm, authorities around the country are amassing cases ranging from identity theft to hotel price gouging.

In Louisiana, dozens of victims have applied for benefits from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, only to find their personal identification information has been stolen and already used. In Texas, authorities say people falsely claiming to be refugees

collected
hundreds
of dollars
in emer-
gency aid

— some-
times going back two or three
times each day.

Online

► www.fema.gov/

► www.redcross.org/

In Mississippi, authorities are on the lookout for a woman who was charging victims \$50 to use her “super-duper FEMA phone” — which she said would let callers bypass busy signals on a direct hot line to the agency.

“There are some real odd-ball cases,” said Mississippi Assistant Attorney General Grant Hedgepeth, who heads the state’s consumer protection office. Mississippi investigators have received more than 1,000 complaints — about hotel and gas price gouging, phony insurance adjuster scams, people posing as FEMA workers to collect victims’ personal information.

The Red Cross is investigating more than 500 fraud cases, said spokeswoman Deborah Goldberg. The Justice Department has charged 34 people with fraud stemming from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The federal government created an anti-fraud task force the week after the storm hit.

Scam artists “can show up to disaster relief centers in almost every state and present themselves as victims, and have nothing to show for it,” said Jeannette Adkins, executive director of the National Organization of Victim Assistance. “And people are handing out the money.”

Sign-up times

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Friday, October 14, 2005

Families can sign up for the Warm the Children campaign from 8 a.m. through 5 p.m. Wednesday and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday at the Lincoln School Head Start, 154 W. Clark St. Organizers are also looking for volunteers to help families shop at Meijer from November through January. To sign up, call Kris Ann Kraeuter at 789-8610. In addition, the program is sponsored by community donations. Monetary donations can be dropped off or mailed to the Jackson Citizen Patriot, 214 S. Jackson St., Jackson, MI 49201

Natural gas costs less in Michigan

State's rates are lowest in Midwest

October 14, 2005

**BY ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER**

Michigan heating bills will be high this winter, but they'll be among the lowest in the country, according to a federal report.

Peter Lark, chairman of the Michigan Public Service Commission, appearing at the agency's Be WinterWise campaign to lower gas bills at the Salvation Army office in Southfield, said Michigan consumers pay the eighth-lowest prices for natural gas in America.

A report published by the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration says that Michiganders are paying some of the lowest prices -- an average of \$10.63 per thousand cubic feet (mcf) -- in the country to heat their homes. Michigan also has the least expensive costs in the Midwest, the report says.

Wholesale gas prices have nearly tripled since 2001 as supplies have tightened because of rising global demand and cuts in production because of hurricane damage to natural gas distribution facilities in the Gulf of Mexico.

"Nobody likes to see a 38% increase from a year earlier, but that is about half the increase the rest of the country is in store for this winter," Lark said Thursday. "Our gas prices are quite good due to the amount we have in underground storage around the state."

He was referring to a PSC report released Tuesday, which says the cost of natural gas for the upcoming winter season is expected to average 46% more than it did last year. For the year, prices are expected to be 38% higher.

According to the EIA rankings, Alaskans pay the least with an average of \$6.04 per thousand cubic feet, while Hawaii residents pay the most at \$27.8.

A well-insulated 1,800 square-foot home in Michigan typically uses an average of 120,000 cubic feet of natural gas a year, Lark says.

With 80% of the natural gas it expects to use this winter available in underground storage, Michigan is one of the lucky states heading into the cold-weather season. Despite having significant supplies in storage, Michigan natural gas prices will remain high because utilities have to buy enough natural gas on the open market to satisfy the remaining 20% of anticipated demand this winter.

Michigan has the largest underground storage capacity for natural gas in the nation with 55 fields throughout the Lower Peninsula, according to EIA. All of the state's utilities buy gas by way of futures contracts from producers and gas marketers throughout North America.

Contact ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA at 313-222-5008 or bodipo@freepress.com.

Newsline for blind has little time

October 14, 2005

BY BILL LAITNER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

In 1999, when Doug Spade became a state representative from Adrian, he used a new service to hear articles from the Detroit Free Press spoken by computer over the phone.

Spade, 54, has been blind since birth. He still listens each day to the electronic voice.

Now, in the wake of government budget cuts and a shrinking pot of private donations, the free service that offers more than 200 newspapers to the blind and disabled will end Nov. 30 for want of \$40,000 in annual funding.

Spade, who was forced by term limits out of his House seat last year, hopes that state lawmakers ride to the rescue, but isn't counting on it because "the state budget is so tight now," he said Thursday.

"If people would just contribute, that would buy some time," he said.

The Newsline for the Blind of Michigan serves about 2,000 Michiganders -- mainly the sight-impaired, but many others too, some with arthritis or neurological problems, whose doctors certify they can't see or hold a newspaper.

State Rep. Chris Kolb, D-Ann Arbor, said he planned to introduce a bill in the state House this year that would add no more than one cent to all phone bills in the state to pay for the service.

Its funding has "bounced from grant to grant," and last year depended on donations, "so what we want is an established funding source," Kolb said Thursday.

The service is free, in part because many blind people have low incomes but also because, in 1931, Congress ordered that library services nationwide be offered free to blind people, said Sue Chinault at the Library of Michigan in Lansing, where she is manager of Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

"The Newsline service is an extension of that philosophy," she said Thursday.

The service originates in Baltimore, Md., at the headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind, the nonprofit group that helped develop the computerized-voice technology and, since March 2002, has made the computerized readings available nationwide.

To receive the service, each state pays the federation a fee, based on population, up to \$40,000 a year, said John Pare, director of sponsored technology programs at the federation. The money pays for computer equipment, a staff of eight and nationwide promotion.

"Our goal is to break even on this," Pare said Thursday. "At the moment, our telephone service is being paid by a federal grant that we expect to run out in about a year," he said.

Besides the Free Press, the service has scores of other papers, including USA Today and the Lansing State Journal, which send their entire contents free each day to the service, so that articles Newsline's users hear are timely, he said.

To learn about Newsline for the Blind of Michigan, call 810-233-4776 anytime. And to donate to the service, send contributions to National Federation of the Blind in Michigan, 1212 N. Foster, Lansing, MI 48912 and mention the Newsline program.

STATE BUDGET

Newspaper-reading service for blind to end

In the wake of state budget cuts and a shrinking pot of private donations, the free service that offers more than 200 newspapers via phone to blind and disabled people will end Nov. 30 for want of \$40,000 in annual funding.

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By Bill Laitner

Free P

Judge denies Cox's request to halt ruling on same-sex benefits

10/12/2005, 5:37 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — An Ingham County judge on Wednesday denied the state attorney general's request to temporarily halt a ruling that allows public-sector employers to provide health insurance to the partners of gay employees.

Republican Attorney General Mike Cox had asked Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk to halt her ruling and stop the state and city of Kalamazoo from offering domestic partner benefits until the issue can be decided by the appellate courts.

Draganchuk declined to issue a temporary restraining order.

She ruled last month that public universities and governments can provide domestic partner benefits without violating a gay marriage ban approved by voters last year. Cox is appealing that ruling.

Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm wants the state Civil Service Commission to approve domestic partner benefits for state employees. The benefits had been included in new labor contracts, but Granholm put them on hold while waiting for a court ruling.

Cox thinks the constitutional amendment prohibits Kalamazoo and other public employers from providing domestic partner benefits in future contracts.

Michigan Report

October 13, 2005

COX TO PRESS APPEAL ON PARTNER BENEFITS

Though he has been denied an injunction to prevent the state from going forward with same-sex partner benefits for its employees, Attorney General Mike Cox will appeal a ruling that the benefits are legal.

Cox spokesperson Allison Pierce confirmed Thursday that the appeal of Ingham Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk's ruling was coming. Ms. Draganchuk on Wednesday denied Mr. Cox's request to stay her ruling that the benefits were legal until higher courts could review it.

Let voters decide benefits issue for gay couples

Muskegon Chronicle Editorial

Thursday, October 13, 2005

The sad truth about Proposal 2, which was purportedly only about banning legal marriages of homosexual couples, is that the voters in Michigan were sold a hurtful lie. Right up until the day of the vote last November, advocates of the measure were decrying the arguments of those who said the referendum was really about stripping away health insurance already awarded such couples, or depriving them of other important benefits.

They insisted the proposal was only aimed at putting a stop to "gay" marriage, which was already against the law in Michigan. We were unconvinced, and, as we noted in our Oct. 11, 2004, editorial in opposition to Proposal 2, we suspected that the weasel wording of the language would almost certainly "(take) matters into legal territory that is unclear and uncertain, where it might possibly hurt people by causing them to lose benefits they have already been given in the private sector."

Like clockwork, within months after passage, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox unilaterally declared that partners in same-sex relationships were not eligible for benefits under Michigan law. Some 21 couples who work for the city of Kalamazoo and had already been awarded such benefits before Proposal 2's passage, sued. They recently won their case before Ingham Circuit County Judge Joyce Dragonchuk, who concluded the referendum was about marriage, not benefits. The case is on appeal.

We say, let the voters decide if they now want to take away health benefits, insurance privileges and even the ability to make critical life-or-death decisions by partners in same-sex relationships. The original proposal should have spelled out these prohibitions. Instead, supporters hid them on purpose behind obtuse language that obscured the real purpose of this measure -- to punish people for who they are.

Just a thought on helping those who need it most

Gladwin County Record

October 14, 2005

By the Rev. Karen Blatt

Like all of you I know about the devastation wrought by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Like you, I and others have given to some kind of call for funds, perhaps through our churches or the American Red Cross. And these funds are needed.

However, probably not like all of you, I serve on the Gladwin County Human Services Coordinating Board, a board made up of the various social service agencies that serve Gladwin County.

Here I have gotten to know the people who work in these agencies for us. I have also gotten to know what is happening to these agencies because of the lack of state and federal funds for such groups as the Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency, Community Mental Health, Strong Families-Safe Children, Literacy Council, and others. The cuts to these agencies is such that it is realistic to say that many of us who need and rely on social welfare to make our lives possible are becoming desperate people, and desperate people do desperate things.

So I would like to suggest that as you are giving to the hurricane relief, you also give to the United Way of Gladwin County, to the Walk for Warmth, and that you visit our state representatives and senators when they visit our county so they can know of the need that we have.

And just in case you were wondering, this letter is totally my idea – no one from any of the agencies asked me to do this. I just know it is needed, because I know that when we know what is happening to our neighbors, we care.

Karen Blatt is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Beaverton

That Was a Short War on Poverty

By E. J. Dionne Jr.

The Washington Post

Friday, October 14, 2005; Page A19

It has long been said that Americans have short attention spans, but this is ridiculous: Our bold, urgent, far-reaching, post-Katrina war on poverty lasted maybe a month.

Credit for our ability to reach rapid closure on the poverty issue goes first to a group of congressional conservatives who seized the post-Katrina initiative before advocates of poverty reduction could get their plans off the ground.

As soon as President Bush announced his first spending package for reconstructing New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the Republican Study Committee and other conservatives switched the subject from poverty reduction to how Katrina reconstruction plans might increase the deficit that their own tax-cutting policies helped create.

Unwilling to freeze any of the tax cuts, these conservatives proposed cutting other spending to offset Katrina costs. The headlines focused on the seemingly easy calls on pork-barrel spending. But some of their biggest cuts were in health care programs, including Medicaid, and other spending for the poor.

Thus, the budget Congress is now considering would cut spending by \$35 billion and cut taxes by \$70 billion. Excuse me, but doesn't this *increase* the deficit by a net of \$35 billion?

Don't worry, said Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana, one of the leading House conservatives. Cutting taxes for the rich is the best antipoverty program. "I'm mindful of what a pipe fitter once said to President Reagan," Pence said, according to the New York Times. "I've never been hired by a poor man." A growing economy is in the interest of every working American, regardless of their income."

In other words, the conservatives have moved the conversation to ideas that go back to Calvin Coolidge's low-tax economics from the 1920s. And they say liberals are the folks with the "old" ideas?

If it didn't matter, I'd be inclined to salute the agenda-setting genius of the right wing. But since we need a national conversation on poverty, it's worth considering that conservatives were successful in pushing it back in part because of weaknesses on the liberal side.

Right out of the box, conservatives started blaming the persistent poverty unearthed by Katrina on the failure of "liberal programs." If there was a liberal retort, it didn't get much coverage in the supposedly liberal media.

It's conservatives, after all, who spent almost a decade touting the genius of the 1996 welfare reform and claiming that because so many people had been driven off the welfare rolls, poverty was no longer a problem.

Yes, welfare reform worked better than some of us expected in the 1990s. But Katrina underscored the limits of welfare reform by showing how many people had been left behind. It also brought home the failure of conservative economics. The Clinton economy -- bolstered by balanced budgets, tax increases on the rich and the expansion of innovative programs such as the earned-income tax credit and health coverage for the poor -- cut the number of poor people by

7.7 million between 1993 and 2000. Between 2001 and 2004, on the other hand, the number of those in poverty rose by 4.1 million.

Or consider that a recent Census Bureau report found that the percentage of Americans getting private job-based health insurance fell from 63.6 percent in 2000 to 59.8 percent in 2004. What held down the number of Americans without insurance altogether? The proportion insured under government programs -- Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program -- rose from 10.6 percent in 2000 to 12.9 percent in 2004. A time when more Americans than ever need government-provided health insurance is when we should expand government assistance for health care, not cut it back. It's also a good time for raising the minimum wage and increasing the help the earned-income tax credit offers the working poor.

But liberals also need to seize the initiative by speaking candidly and not defensively about the social causes of poverty. These include family breakdown and the heavy concentration of very poor people in a *small* number of neighborhoods in our big cities. Just because some conservatives are tempted, wrongly, to blame all poverty on problems in the family doesn't mean that liberals should shy away from talking about the difficulties faced by children in fatherless homes.

I was naive enough to hope that after Katrina the left and the right might have useful things to say to each other about how to help the poorest among us. I guess we've moved on. You can lay a lot of the blame for this indifference on conservatives. But it will be a default on the part of liberals if the poor disappear again from public view without a fight.

postchat@aol.com